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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000730

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SUBJECT: NEW GOVERNOR APPOINTMENTS CONFIRM IDLG'S ROLE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary. The Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) has, over the last two weeks, either fired or moved the governors of three provinces, and is ready to relieve several more. Ghazni Governor Faizan has been fired, and replaced by Mr. Sher Khosti. Helmand Governor Wafa was moved to a position on the National Security Council, and Governor Gulabuddin Mangal was moved from Laghman to Helmand. Mr. Kutfullah Mashal was then appointed governor of Laghman. The next governor to go will be Farah Governor Baluch, who will be replaced by Mr. Ruhul Ahmin, who comes from an NGO background. The Governor of Nuristan is likely to be removed soon, in part due to concerns over his long absences from the province, and beleaguered Herat Governor Anwari may be moved to another province. IDLG continues to assert successfully its prerogative in the appointment of governors and its influence over the sub-national governance reform effort.

Mangal Moves to Helmand

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12. (C) Of the various changes of governors, the appointment of Mangal to insurgent-plagued Helmand may be the most critical. U.S. and UK military in Helmand were uniformly critical of Wafa, seeing him as obstructive, uninterested, and opposed to the UK presence in Helmand. The Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) chose Mangal because of his proven track record as the Pashtun governor of two Pashtun provinces, Paktika and Laghman, and his ability to work well with tribes (particularly in Paktika, with its strong tribal structure). Mangal also held poppy production in Laghman to less than 600 hectares (in sharp contrast to neighboring Nangarhar Province, which produced 19,000 hectares last season), and has worked well with Coalition forces in both his previous appointments. IDLG Deputy Barna Karimi sees him as a solid, loyal official, who can get things accomplished. Karimi also believes that, because the governor is from the Mangal tribe of Paktia Province, he may be able to act as a neutral arbiter between Helmand's often violently contending tribes. In Helmand, Mangal will face an active insurgency, weak government structures, massive opium production, Taliban control of several districts, non-government poles of power, particularly former governor Sher Mohammad Akhunzada, and very real threats against his

person. The Embassy has assured Mangal of its full support.

Khosti Takes Over Ghazni

13. (C) Sher Khosti, the new governor of Ghazni, was an English-language newscaster on Afghan television. IDLG appointed him in part for his perceived ability to work well with the international community, and to attract international aid to Ghazni. Khosti told us he will also focus on implementing the rule of law, improving infrastructure (particularly roads), linking people to the government, and maintaining security along the Ring Road. The Embassy has offered Khosti full support, while making it clear that corruption will not be tolerated and that U.S. assistance is for people and places we have confidence in.

14. (C) Khosti will also face an increased insurgency in some districts, weak police forces, and corruption. Khosti noted that Ghazni can be "volatile" in part due to its population's Hazara-Pashtun split. Khosti is a Pashtun originally from Khost Province, although he has lived many years in the United States. He is well known to U.S. forces from his time in Khost Province, where he was an informal assistant to then Governor Patan in 2004 and 2005. There was considerable skepticism among U.S. officers at the time, in part due to his informal status, and in part due to his ties to Patan, who was suspected of large-scale corruption. However, Khosti's tenure should be an improvement over the five-month governorship of Faizan, who, early on, lost the confidence of the population in his management ability and was flagrant in displaying the fruits of his corruption.

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Kutfullah Mashal to Laghman

15. (C) Laghman Governor Mangal was replaced by Mr. Kutfullah Mashal, who previously worked as a spokesman at the Ministry of Interior, as the Director of Policy at the National Security Council, and was also former Ambassador Khalilzad's translator. IDLG Director Jelani Popal said he convinced a skeptical President Karzai by praising Mashal as capable, energetic, and a fast learner. Governor Mangal leaves Laghman better than when he entered office, with security, governance, and the economy improved - advantages upon which Mashal should be able to build.

Farah and Nuristan Governors May Change

16. (C) The profoundly incompetent Governor Baluch of Farah Province will be replaced by Mr. Ruhul Ahmin, currently the deputy director of the Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan, an Afghan NGO. This will be a change for the better. Farah PRT officers see Baluch as an ineffective governor, and have strong suspicions that he is tied into corruption and Farah's booming drug trade. IDLG has said that Nuristan Governor Tamim Nuristani may also be replaced soon, in part as a result of his frequent and extended absences from the province. Regrettably, PRT Nuristan officers have a generally favorable view of the governor, whom they see as capable and attuned to Nuristan's unique culture in a way no outsider could achieve.

Paktia Governor Hamdard Gets Backing

17. (C) Popal is upbeat about recently appointed Paktia Governor Hamdard, saying he is making good contact with the people, is a "sharp guy", and is doing reasonably well in his new position. In a March 6 meeting with the Ambassador, Governor Hamdard, a former Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin commander, said unifying the tribes, and working with the international community are two important tasks of

his job. His five top priorities, in descending order, are education; providing access to health care; building and rebuilding roads; electricity; and creating jobs. Hamdard said Paktia is a "traditional" province, run in part by jirgas and councils. The Embassy has told Hamdard that we will "support success" and urged Hamdard to unify the people of the province, increase communications with them, and rally their support for the Karzai government. Hamdard said Paktia is becoming increasingly secure as tribal elders contribute to security; without the support of the tribes, the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police would not be able to secure Paktia. The governor said more work needs to be done with the tribes, adding that cooperation between Afghan Security Forces and Coalition Forces is quite good. He expects the number of attacks by cross-border insurgents to increase in the spring.

IDLG Consolidates its Role and Influence

18. (C) The IDLG's recent actions have resulted in a net improvement in the quality of governors. The appointments appear to be based on several factors: honesty, loyalty to the Karzai administration, ability to communicate with the populace, and the ability to work with the international community. The IDLG also appears to be drawing on a larger talent pool from which to select governors, including a noticeable tendency to have individuals with an NGO background (reflecting Popal's own experiences and contacts).

While successful governors may still be moved from one province to another, those who fail are more frequently being fired, rather than merely shuffled and given further opportunities to fail. At the same time, the glimpses we see of the appointment process reveal considerable behind the scenes politicking, with Karzai refusing some IDLG recommendations. Regardless, the IDLG has been able to replace a well-connected but weak governor (Wafa), a

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well-connected thug (Faizan), and move one of Afghanistan's better governors to one of its toughest provinces (Mangal to Helmand).

WOOD